

OFFICE WARS - GEN X VS GEN Y

“Every generation is a secret society and has incommunicable enthusiasm, tastes and interests which are a mystery both to its predecessor and to posterity.” - Arthur Chapman

*“The young do not know enough to be prudent, and therefore they attempt the impossible-and achieve it, generation after generation.”
- Pearl S. Buck*

A force of over 800,000 Generation-Yers are in the midst of joining the working world. They bring with them new attitudes and beliefs about work that will change the face of the New Zealand workforce in the years to come.

Born in the late 70's or early 80's to 2002, Gen-Y has grown up in a digital world. The general consensus among disgruntled managers is that Generation Y employees are impatient, demanding and outspoken. They have little work ethic and lack commitment yet expect to climb the corporate ladder with alarming speed.

These beliefs are contrary to the astute work ethic and stability valued by Generation X. As such, unavoidable differences of opinion may spark disagreements turning the office into a warzone.

However, Gen-Y's ease with technology and their creativity are skills that should be prized within an organisation. Juggling the different generations in one workplace can be a challenge but it is important for managers to recognise the value of this varied skill set as a business asset; businesses are getting the best of both worlds.

But how can business leaders optimise their productivity, creativity and soften the impact of the generational differences on workplace culture?

The following are some tips for getting the best out of the creative, but often fickle Gen-Y:

- **Relationship building:** People are less likely to leave companies where they have friends so attempt to build effective relationships by showing an interest in people personally and professionally.
- **Provide frequent feedback:** Gen-Y employees value feedback on their performance.
- **Reward outstanding efforts:** Give your employees instant recognition when they excel.

- **Adopt a collaborative management style:** Autocratic management doesn't sit well with the collaborative approach of Generation Y.
- **Work-life balance:** Recognise that younger employees want control of their time and enjoy the freedom of a healthy work-life balance.
- **Professional support:** Ensure your employees have your encouragement and support for their personal growth and development plans.
- **Meaningful work:** All generations are motivated by money to a certain extent but a greater incentive for Generation Y is performing meaningful work. Let employees know how their work contributes to the goals of the organisation and be appreciative of their part in reaching those goals.
- **Train early:** Gen-Y is infamous for their job hopping attitudes. As such, train well towards the beginning of their employments in order to maximise the return on your investments.
- **Career pathways:** Discuss career pathways and opportunities with your employees at regular intervals.

As more and more members of Generation Y enter the workforce, the greater the challenge becomes for managers to balance two seemingly contradictory belief systems. Used as a rule book, such analysis of the generations can be counterproductive as it serves to reinforce stereotypes. It is crucial to always view your employees as a group of individuals, rather than a group of generations. Thus, be mindful that they will have unique requirements and ensure you mould your company policy around their needs.

Want to learn more about how to effectively manage different generations? Attend the Chamber's comprehensive People Management workshops.

Information sourced from business.govt.nz